

Best Practices for Addressing COVID-19 Vaccination in Long-Term Care Facilities

It is not vaccines, but the act of vaccinating, that saves lives. Safe and effective vaccines against COVID-19 have been developed, but if the vaccines are not given it will not matter how much time, effort, and money went into developing them. It is important to instill confidence and provide clear and evidence-based information on COVID-19 vaccines to empower your staff and residents to make informed and educated decisions regarding vaccination.

Prepare Staff for COVID-19 Vaccination

Emphasize the benefits of vaccinating against COVID-19

It is important to clearly weigh the benefits of vaccinating against COVID-19 and the risks associated with COVID-19 infection:

- Getting vaccinated will save lives. Your staff are on the frontline and at high risk of exposure to COVID-19.
 - Vaccinating staff not only protects them from getting sick but may also protect their family, friends, and your residents from the virus.
- Vaccines are thoroughly reviewed and must be found to be both safe and effective before they are authorized or licensed in the U.S.
- Both the Moderna and Pfizer vaccine have been found to be highly efficacious, putting them among some of the most effective vaccines we have available.
- Side effects from vaccinating against COVID-19 are typically mild and resolve on their own in 1-2 days.
- Severe allergic reactions to vaccination are rare and manageable with treatment.
- The risks of COVID-19 infection are still being determined, but what we do know:
 - LTCF residents and staff accounted for 6% of COVID-19 cases *but represented [40% of deaths](#) in the U.S. from the virus.*
 - There is no way to predict how COVID-19 will affect someone once they are infected.
 - We still do not know the long-term effects from COVID-19 infection.
 - In [North Dakota](#): 1 in 600 have died, 1 in 215 have been hospitalized, and 1 in 8 have tested positive from COVID-19.

Distribute COVID-19 vaccine resources

The CDC and NDDoH have developed a number of COVID-19 vaccine resources that can be provided to staff. They can be accessed below:

- [CDC Sample Letter to Staff on COVID-19 Vaccine](#)
- [CDC Long-Term Care Facility Staff: Answering Common Questions about COVID-19 Vaccine](#)
- [NDDoH Dr. Carson's Video for LTCF Staff on COVID-19 Vaccine](#)
- [NDDoH COVID-19 Vaccine and Pregnancy Handout](#)

Be prepared to answer questions regarding COVID-19 vaccines

If staff have concerns or questions, this doesn't necessarily mean they won't accept a COVID-19 vaccine. Sometimes they simply want answers to their questions. The following are useful resources to help you stay informed and equipped to address COVID-19 vaccine-related questions:

- [NDDoH COVID-19 Vaccine Frequently Asked Questions for the General Public](#)
- [NDDoH COVID-19 Vaccine Frequently Asked Questions for Healthcare Professionals](#)
- [CDC Website: Answering Patients' Questions on COVID-19 Vaccination](#)
- [CDC Vaccinate with Confidence Handout](#)

How to address staff that have already had COVID-19

Staff should be vaccinated regardless of a previous COVID-19 infection. It is important to vaccinate due to the severe health risks associated with COVID-19, the vulnerable population served in long-term care settings, and the fact that re-infection with COVID-19 is possible. However, anyone currently infected with COVID-19 should wait to get vaccinated until after their illness has resolved and after they have met the criteria to discontinue isolation.

At this time, experts do not know how long someone is protected from getting sick again after recovering from COVID-19. Current evidence suggests reinfection is uncommon in the 90 days after initial infection, and thus, persons with documented acute infection in the preceding 90 days may defer vaccination until the end of this period, if desired. But the NDDoH strongly suggests that long-term care facility staff be vaccinated regardless of a staff members COVID-19 infection history.

Consider designating a COVID-19 vaccine expert at your facility

By designating an individual as a COVID-19 vaccine expert, you have a staff member who is:

- Responsible for being up-to-date on COVID-19 vaccine information and recommendations.
- Able to answer questions staff have regarding COVID-19 vaccine.
- Aware of current information for COVID-19 vaccine planning and distribution in North Dakota.

The CDC offers a number of [COVID-19 vaccine training modules](#). Further, the NDDoH offers state wide planning meetings regarding COVID-19 vaccine for our state that a staff member could attend weekly to remain up-to-date.

How to Address Staff COVID-19 Vaccine Refusal

One-on-one conversation for vaccine decliners and direct supervisors

It is important to assess *why* an individual is refusing COVID-19 vaccine so their concerns can be addressed. Supervisors/directors and vaccine-declining staff should set a time to discuss vaccine concerns and address questions.

For supervisors/directors: A willingness to listen is key to understanding where their concern lies. Be open and non-judgmental when exploring their concerns. It is also imperative to use open questions when conducting the vaccine conversation (e.g. "Tell me what your concerns are..."; "Can you tell me more about...") to explore why they are truly refusing. Remember: Sometimes people simply need more information and answers to their concerns from a trusted source to accept a COVID-19 vaccine. Address concerns using evidence-based information. If you do not know the answer to a question, it is ok to tell your staff member that you will find out the answer and report back when you know more information.

The NDDoH and CDC have a number of resources which can help you educate your staff regarding COVID-19 vaccination. They are listed [above](#).

Provide incentives to vaccinate

Some healthcare facilities in North Dakota are trying to improve vaccination rates through:

- Paid incentives – e.g. \$100.00 to employees who complete 2nd dose of vaccine

- PTO requirements – e.g. individuals who refuse vaccination must use their own PTO for quarantine and isolation associated with COVID-19 exposure and illness
- Emphasize that a fully vaccinated population is our quickest path back to normal
 - PPE and testing not likely to change until we are near herd immunity through vaccination

Have vaccine decliners review and sign a declination form

It is important that individuals are *aware* and *educated* about their decision to not vaccinate against COVID-19. Not only does the use of a declination form ensure that the individual is informed when they make their decision, but also reduces misconceptions regarding COVID-19 vaccine.

It is helpful to have a supervisor read through the form with an individual rather than giving it to an employee to read and sign on their own. This opens dialogue and in some cases leads to the employee changing their mind and deciding to be vaccinated.

The NDDoH has developed a [Declination of COVID-19 Vaccination for Healthcare Professionals](#). This form can be changed and/or tailored with your facilities logos and aesthetics.